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Paris - Innovation and Plant Biotechnology to Address Food Security

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Biotechnology

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Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

Research and innovation in agriculture to address food security challenges were top priorities set by the G20 agricultural ministerial declaration agreed on in Paris on June 23, 2011, under the French Presidency of the G20. These were all in line with the messages of two meetings that took place in the Paris a few days earlier: the June 14 seminar organized by FAS/Paris on "Agricultural Innovation for Achieving Food Security" and the "Agricultural Knowledge Systems: Responding to Global Food Security and Climate Change Challenges" organized by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on June 15-17. International speakers, including several high-level U.S. experts, were speakers at both meetings. These followed a number of successful actions conducted by FAS/Paris in the past few years, focusing on plant biotechnology as a tool to address agricultural

productivity, sustainability and food security in both developed and developing countries. FAS/Paris believes it is of the highest importance to continue further in this direction, and currently seeks to arrange a large-scale conference on agricultural innovation for Developing Countries in FY 2012.

General Information:

Introduction

The agricultural ministerial meeting of the G20 was organized on June 22-23, 2011, under the French Presidency. The G20 ministerial declaration, unanimously adopted on June 23, stated that G20 members “recognize the need to increase sustainable agricultural production and productivity to improve food security,” “agree to strengthen agricultural research for development,” “stress the importance of research and development on agricultural productivity, including on orphan crops and crops more suitable for developing countries climates and constraints, such as legumes, making the best use of all available plant genetic resources for food and agriculture,” and “commit to enabling environment to encourage and increase public and private investment in agriculture.”

These commitments were all in line with the messages of two meetings that took place in Paris a few days before the G20 agricultural ministerial: the June 14 seminar organized by FAS/Paris in the AgroParisTech University entitled [“Agricultural Innovation for Achieving Food Security”](#) and the [Agricultural Knowledge Systems \(AKS\): Responding to Global Food Security and Climate Change Challenges](#) organized by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on June 15-17.

FAS/Paris June 14 Seminar: Agricultural Innovation for Achieving Food Security

The June 14 seminar followed actions conducted by FAS/Paris in the past few years, including meetings and seminars for U.S. visitors (both scientists and regulators) presenting their approach of plant biotechnology as a tool to address agricultural productivity, sustainability and food security in both developed and developing countries. These visits included Dr. Claude Fauquet, a Franco-American researcher and director of the International Laboratory of Tropical Agricultural Biotechnology (ILTAB) at the Danforth Plant Science Center in St Louis, Missouri, in 2009 and 2010; Dr. Carol Kramer-Leblanc, former USDA Director, Sustainable Development, Office of the Chief Economist in 2010 and 2011; and Dr. Roger Beachy, President Emeritus, Danforth Plant Science Center, and former Director of USDA’s National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA), in 2010 and 2011 (for more information, please see report [FR9067](#), dated May 17, 2011 and [FR9050](#), dated October 14, 2010). These speakers’ perspectives were overall well-perceived by the usually overly cautious French audience. For more information on their visit to Paris, bios and presentations, visit our website: <http://www.usda-france.fr/biotechnology-en.htm> and <http://www.usda-france.fr/sustainable-agriculture.htm>.

Speakers at the June 14 seminar included Dr Agnes Ricroch, Professor in AgroParisTech; Bernard Bachelier, Director of the French FARM Foundation; Pierre-Henri Texier, French Ministry of Agriculture; and Dr. Roger Beachy, President Emeritus, Donald Danforth Center, and former Director of USDA’s NIFA. Dr. Beachy presented the U.S. Government [Feed the Future](#) initiative (FTF), which Bachelier found exemplary and said “we are very envious of FTF,” regretting no similar program had been launched in Europe. Bachelier welcomed the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation efforts regarding food security in the developing world.

French speakers expressed high expectations from the G20 Agricultural Ministerial meeting that followed the seminar, including mainly highlighting the strategic importance of agricultural production to address global food security challenges, and the key position of agricultural innovation, including biotechnology, in that respect. The seminar was attended by the French agricultural press Agra Presse, which published a two-page article entitled “the U.S. beats the EU in Developing Agriculture of Poor Countries”. The article insisted on the importance of partnership to successfully address global food security, an aspect that was mainly developed by Dr. Beachy.

OECD Agricultural Knowledge Systems: Responding to Global Food Security and Climate Change Challenges

At the AKS meeting, experts from various countries in the world, including the United States (namely, Dr. Roger Beachy, Dr. Michael Schetchman, biotechnology coordinator, USDA/Agricultural Research Service, and Julian Aston, University of California, Davis) met on the necessity of including science and innovation in agriculture. U.S. speakers illustrated the importance of research, development and innovation in agriculture by public and private entities both in the U.S. and as technology and knowledge transfer to developing countries.

Several examples of successful uses of innovation in agriculture were presented in the cases of South Africa and Brazil. A number of speakers agreed that no action is not an option in the current context of fragile global food security, need for a more sustainable agriculture and necessity to mitigate climate change, and that action needs to be conducted through a global approach improving public/private partnership.

Interestingly, the President of the French Corn Growers Association insisted on the need to strengthen links between French universities and applied research institutes/extension services. He stated that French corn growers have high expectations from genetics and biotechnology in general, more specifically to meet the recent commitment by the French government to significantly reduce the use of chemicals in agricultural production. Finally, he regretted that in France farmers don't have the right to commercially cultivate biotech crops, although significant amounts are imported on a daily basis.

Several speakers pointed the key influence European leaders have on African leaders, and highlighted the fact that African policy makers are tempted to copy European policy makers in their choice of banning biotechnology in agriculture, although situations differ greatly in Europe and in Africa. A speaker from the Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI) Initiative at the Rome office of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), presented the past decade investments in agricultural R&D in African countries. Interestingly, the bulk of the 20 percent increase observed in investments in 2001-2008 resided in Eastern African countries that are not under French influence (mainly Nigeria), while R&D investments declined in francophone West African countries.

Conclusion

With the G20 ministerial declaration, and the successful actions conducted in recent years and months, FAS/Paris feels encouraged to continue further actions in the direction of promoting plant biotechnology as a tool for achieving food security in developing countries, in collaboration with French government representatives as well as representatives of Developing countries. FAS/Paris believes it is

of the highest importance to continue further in this direction, and currently seeks to arrange a large-scale conference on agricultural innovation for Developing Countries in FY 2012.